Interview with Robert R. Bowie

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DR. ROBERT R. BOWIE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is March 15, 1988. I am interviewing Dr. Robert Bowie concerning his career with the Department of State and the National Security Council. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Dr. Bowie, I wonder if you could give me a little introduction of hoyou became involved in the field of foreign affairs.

BOWIE: Well I was originally educated as a lawyer and practiced law in Baltimore before World War II. I became involved in foreign affairs as a result of being in the army in World War II. In that period I was basically in the Pentagon in charge of procurement and responsible for aspects of procurement. But at the end of the war I went with General Clay to Germany in the Occupation. He left in about March or April of 1945 to go abroad as Deputy Military Governor. I had worked with him in the procurement field and he asked me to go as a special assistant to Germany. So I spent a year in Germany in the Occupation, working closely with him, and saw pretty much the whole range of problems which were involved, therefore [I] became interested in the whole question of European recovery and the role of Germany and so on.

Then I went back to Harvard to become a member of the faculty of the law school and was asked in 1950, actually '49, by Jack McCloy who had been then named the Deputy Military Governor, to go back with him—McCloy had been named as the Allied High Commissioner and was to take the place of Clay. And so in January of '50 I went to Germany as his general counsel and there I was responsible for the enforcement or the application of the laws dealing with the deconcentration of German industry, coal and steel industry in particular. And by chance the Schuman Plan came in May of '50 and so I became heavily involved in trying to work out the relation between the deconcentration of the German coal and steel industry and the Monnet-Schuman proposal which was designed to provide a supranational framework for the coal and steel industry of Europe.

And after my stint with McCloy at the end of '51 I went back again to the Law School, but then in early '53 I was asked by SecretarDulles to come down and become head of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department.

Q: How did you become acquainted with Secretary Dulles?

BOWIE: I hadn't known Dulles until he employed me. Bedell Smith had been in Germany with Eisenhower as his deputy before Clay came to take charge of the military government. I don't believe I knew Smith, but Smith obviously knew Clay and Smith had become the Undersecretary of State under Dulles at the beginning of the Eisenhower Administration. And I got a call from General Smith, to come down and talk to him in I guess it was February. And so we had a discussion of what the post was—I didn't know what it was about and he explained to me what it was. The purpose was to be the head of the Policy Planning Staff, take the place of Paul Nitze, and then also to serve as the State Department member of the National Security Council Planning Board which was then being constituted by Eisenhower, which he wanted to make a major instrument as part of the policymaking process.

And after I'd had a talk with Smith and I went back and thought it over, I told him I would be very much interested. So then as I remember, I came down again and he took me in to meet Dulles. We had a little conversation again about what the job was about and I remember only two points which we discussed as far as my appointment went. I don't remember whether he asked me, but I told him there were two things he ought to know. One was that I was registered as a Democrat but I had voted for Eisenhower. And he said that didn't matter because he wasn't going to use me politically and as long as I had voted for Eisenhower that was sufficient. Second, I told him that I would rather forcefully express my views and try to convince him of whatever it was I thought was the right course, that I would be loyal as far as not taking things to the newspapers but that I was not interested in the job unless he wanted somebody who would really speak up and say what he thought. He said that was just exactly what he did want. And I said that perhaps he ought to inquire about that aspect of things from Clay or McCloy who could tell him how I operated. To the best of my knowledge he did not pursue that, but I wondered later whether perhaps I had been recommended by Clay who was, I think, doing some recruiting for the Administration, or by McCloy who was of course known to Dulles and others.

In any event, he said he would like to have me come aboard. So then I had to finish out about a month more of teaching before I could come down in the middle of April.

Q: When you arrived the policy planning staff had been under Paul Nitze for a while. Did you find it was being used under him, at least from what you could gather, in an efficient manner.

BOWIE: Well, I had not known Paul before but we immediately struck up a friendship and he was still there when I was recruited. So I immediately went to see him and he in fact gave me a rundown on individual members of the staff and what he thought their strengths and weaknesses were and how he would use them. So the transition actually was very friendly. A number of members of the staff were very able and were prepared to remain. Some of the others were also very good, but one of them was an academic who

returned to his university and one or two later decided to leave. But a number of members of the staff continued on. But I recruited others in order to fill in.My impression was that the staff was a good staff under Paul and had been used effectively. My impression also was that Acheson had used Paul to some extent somewhat more in operations than I thought was going to be either desirable or feasible for me because I had this additional responsibility of the NSC Planning Board. Before that I believe that role had been taken by the counselor who was Chip Bohlen. And the plan under the Eisenhower Administration was to consolidate the two jobs. That was going to make it obviously a pretty heavy load.

Q: Well now, working on this, two things. The NSC and the policy planning. How did Dulles use the policy planning staff? And did it change as time went on?

BOWIE: I don't believe it changed significantly during the period. Basically Dulles, contrary to the myth, relied very heavily on discussions within the State Department of policy ideas or plans or proposals. He held a discussion anywhere from half an hour to two hours with key people before he took any major decision or made any major proposal to the president. And as head of the Policy Planning Staff I had a standing invitation to attend any policy discussion which I wished. The notion was that as far as possible I would try to confine myself to the issues which seemed to be of the more basic kind rather than getting involved in the day-to-day tactical decisions. But that was certainly not always possible to do.

My notion of the policy planning staff, and I think it was also that of Dulles, was that it should provide a somewhat different dimension of thinking about policies and decisions than were likely to be provided by the other parts of the department. As you know, the regional bureaus tend to have a rather focused view, looking at the world pretty much through the region for which they are responsible. And therefore the European Bureau has a - I won't say narrow - a focused view of what's important and what is relevant. And the same would be true of each of the other regional bureaus. There are obviously some functional parts of the staff like the economic or like the legal advisor, who have a less

narrow view, less focused view. Dulles I think looked at the Policy Planning Staff to provide a wider view, looking beyond the regional or looking at the interconnections between some of the regional perspectives.

And second, again as you probably would agree, the regional bureaus are so caught up in trying to deal with the day-to-day decisions that there's a tendency not to look ahead very far or not to think in larger, more strategic terms. And there again, I think Dulles hoped that the policy planning staff could provide a somewhat more strategic, somewhat longer term assessment of where we were going and what the relation was between a particular decision and where we hoped to go. It was not in a strict sense the idea of getting a blueprint for the long future but rather identification of what ought to be the priorities, what ought to be the direction in which we were going, what would be the larger framework within which we were acting. And as head of the policy planning staff my job was more or less to try to introduce this wider geographical perspective and also this somewhat longer-term assessment of the relation of particular decisions to more basic objectives.

Q: Your experience had been mainly in Europe, particularly in Germany. How did you get some balance on your staff in looking at the Far East, since it seemed that the upper reaches of the State Department were rather heavily staffed with Europeanists as opposed to East Asia hands?

BOWIE: Well, I kept the staff quite small, I don't believe there were more than 10 people, professionals. And I tried to get a choice range of people who were distributed in terms of their knowledge and expertise. With respect to China, I was fortunate to have a man named Charlie Stelle whose family had been missionaries in China for about seven generations. He himself had lived in China before the upheavals and was a man of unusually solid judgment and lucidity and was very good at Far Eastern issues, but also he had taken an interest in arms control and he was valuable in that range of things, too. I had also on the staff Ed Gullion whom you must have known.

Q: Later ambassador to the Congo.

BOWIE: Yes. But he had also served and knew something of Southeast Asia. The other thing was that we tried very hard to utilize the INR [Intelligence and Research] staff very extensive—

Q: Intelligence.

BOWIE: Intelligence staff of the State Department.

Q: Intelligence and Research, yes.

BOWIE: And we would typically ask, when we were going to do some work on an area, for a written report from them about whatever aspects of it interested us. And they, too, had some quite good people on the staff. And then finally we tried to utilize the people in the bureaus, too. There were always people in the bureaus who were quite knowledgeable and quite able, who were typically caught up in their regular day-to-day work, but nevertheless were quite capable of helping in the kind of thinking we were trying to do just because of their background and interest. So we frequently would try to engage them also. In other words, we tried not to have our role as if we were ivory tower or confrontational. We tried to draw on the resources of the Department while introducing, as we saw it at least, a different dimension.

Q: When you came there, and after sort of being given your marching orders, did you feel there was a particular long-range or at least mid-range goal that you wanted to point the statement towards in the world?

BOWIE: That's pretty broad. Let me just say this. I think I should just say a word about Eisenhower's conception of the role of the NSC. Because I think this played a very major part in his approach to policymaking. I think both he and Dulles were very keenly aware of the fact that the world they were facing in '53 was one that was undergoing

very radical change all over the place. You had had, for example, the death of Stalin and the possibilities of change in the Soviet Union on the one hand, plus the fact that the Soviet Union was on its own part trying to affect the way change occurred in its own favor. But then there were all sorts of other forces of change. Europe was obviously recovering from the war but in the course of very fundamental adjustments in the position of particular countries, and it was just beginning the process of European integration, which both Dulles and Eisenhower felt very strongly was in the American interest and in the European interest. So the effort to bring about change there was in the form of the Community and also to try to create defense security through the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and to construct other structures which would contribute to stability.

Then in the Far East you had a great deal of change going on within Japan, but also China in '49 had become Communist so there was all sorts of turmoil there. And in Southeast Asia there was all the results of the decolonializing and of also the French effort not to decolonialize. And in general you had all the effects of the ending of the colonial era and the emergence of all these new countries, most of which were ill-equipped to manage their affairs and very poor.

So the point I'm trying to make is, as Eisenhower and Dulles saw it, we were living in a world in which the United States had very considerable power and the world was changing and the task of foreign policy was to try to manage these changes or help influence these changes in a way that would be positive or beneficial or congenial from the American point of view. And at the same time prevent the Soviet Union from doing the opposite.Now I think they both were keenly aware of the limits of American power. I don't think they had illusions that we were omnipotent—they knew we were predominant in a certain sense, but they didn't think, I believe, that we could just call the shots or direct things and they would happen. In other words, it was necessary to create a framework, a set of conditions, which would foster the things we thought desirable like European integration or NATO and which would frustrate the ones which we thought were harmful like the Soviet efforts to extend its influence. And finally which would help in the gradual development of the countries

which were formerly colonial and which were struggling to find their identity and some form of political structure and economic progress which would hopefully end up being more stable. So I think they saw it as necessary to have a strategy which would assure that your actions had a cumulative impact over time rather than just being an ad hoc handling of particular crises. Now of course you have to handle crises but the question was how you handle them and whether the way you handled them contributed to the longer term evolution in a direction which was positive.

Now, Eisenhower I think saw the NSC as very important in this task. Because he felt, I think, that in order to have a strategy that was soundly based, you have to base it on real knowledge and information. I think he was aware that it meant understanding many parts of the world about which, no matter how well informed, neither he nor the people under him could possibly know the background. And therefore he wanted a process which would mobilize the knowledge and information which was in the government, particularly the agencies like the State Department, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], the Defense Department, and Treasury, and then make judgments about American interests, about the direction of American policy, about priorities. And so he developed this method of having the NSC Planning Board prepare papers. And that meant that its members at about the level of the assistant secretaries in the different departments, put together studies and proposals which were then passed on to the NSC itself, which was composed of the cabinet members concerned with national security. And in the work of the Planning Board, the whole idea was not just to depend on the Board members, but to draw on the expertise that was in the departments. So in that capacity also I constantly was reaching into the various bureaus of the Department with respect to regional and other issues to produce the necessary papers and studies, and to develop the recommendations which then went on up for discussion to the NSC level.

I think myself it was a very good method for educating the various levels of the various departments, and utilizing the knowledge that was there both for sensitizing across the different departments and also for informing the top people about the complexity of the

problems and the character of the world and the forces at work and the American interest and so on.

Now there has been a lot of misunderstanding, I think. I don't believe Eisenhower saw this as the way you make specific decisions, I think he thought you made decisions in successive stages. You first got a framework in which you thought through where you wanted to go, what you wanted to accomplish, what your priorities were, and then the day-to-day decisions were taken in the Oval Office with a much smaller group based on this earlier sensitizing and analysis and decision-making in that sense. But bringing it to bear on the actual concrete issues, crises or what not.

Q: I had one retired Foreign Service Officer say he had the very distinct impression that there was much more sort of cooperation, sharing of knowledge in a positive sense within the government between the various departments during the Eisenhower Administration, than seemed to happen later on. They were more like warring dukedoms later on. Did you —?

BOWIE: I think that was true. I served later in the government in various capacities. I was what is know as an “in-and-outer.” Later on after returning to Harvard, I came back to Washington two other times for a couple of years each in the '60s and '70s. So I saw something of that. And then I saw something of the way in which the government operated in the Truman period from my experience in Germany. And my impression was that, for example, even in the Acheson period—I'm a great admirer of Acheson-but I had the impression that as a result of the cleavage between the Defense Department under Johnson and the State Department, there was practically no interchange. It was very damaging.

In the Eisenhower Administration, largely as a result of this assumption that the Planning Board was intended to merge and provide for the integration of information from all sources, there was a great deal of easy interchange and the providing of information in

a usable form. Also I think that provided a technique for better use of the CIA because when any report or paper, or proposed course was prepared in the Planning Board, we always asked the CIA to produce a national intelligence estimate on the same subject. So that went up along with the paper from the Planning Board. And because the President acquainted himself with both the paper and the estimate, the various members of the Cabinet who were going to take part in the meeting obviously had to do the same thing. So, for example, in the State Department, before every NSC meeting we had a briefing session with Dulles for about two hours on the papers which were going to come up at the NSC meeting. And that was another opportunity for all the interested people in the different bureaus to tell him what they thought of the paper if it dealt with their area; and again this was a form of educating him on the aspects of the paper: if they criticized it, or if they approved it, they could explain why. And that process was taking place in each of the departments before the meeting.

So it seemed to me that the NSC as used in Eisenhower's time was a very ingenious way of causing very busy Cabinet officials who clearly didn't know—if you look at the experience since, couldn't know—much about the world, to become acquainted with it. Through this process they had to think about these papers which were designed, as I said, to lay out the broader forces at work and the American interests and the priorities we ought to have and what our objectives ought to be. Now a lot of people criticized these NSC papers by saying, well, they're so general they don't decide things. Of course they don't, that's not the point. They inform, they sensitize, they force top people to think about the issues before they became day-to-day decisions.

Q: Of courses at that time we were fortunate in having a president who was probably as informed of the intricacies of the world as we've ever had, Eisenhower's experience with the Supreme Allied Commander.

BOWIE: I think it's true. And I think it's finally now, you know, 30 years later, beginning to be understood as the documents are becoming available; the myth that he was

uninterested or not involved or uninformed and that he left all foreign policy to Dulles is finally being exploded. Because nothing was further from the truth. The fact was that Eisenhower took an intimate interest in all the decisions; he made the decisions. Dulles was looked on as a very important advisor and Eisenhower respected him, relied on him. But there was no question whatever that Eisenhower was the one making the decisions, providing the direction, saying yes or no. Dulles was expected to make proposals and to carry the ball through the execution and implementation. And I don't mean to denigrate Dulles' role, but it was definitely that of an advisor who was working with the President, for the President, and the President was very much on top of things.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Eisenhower in either of your two roles?

BOWIE: There was no question about it. In every—it just permeated the whole way things worked. Dulles would have, as I said, these meetings in the Department when a problem came up. He'd have half a dozen, eight people, partly those that he looked to because he liked their judgment, people like Herman Phleger, who was legal advisor but who was much more widely involved, myself in Policy Planning, the person who was head of whatever regional bureau or bureaus that were involved. They were free to bring, if they wanted to, a more specific expert like the desk officer or anybody else that they thought would be able to contribute to the discussion. And Dulles would discuss the problem and reach his judgment. He was like Lincoln, he wasn't taking a consensus, he was finding out where he came out. But he wanted very active discussions.

Then the next step was that he would go and talk to the President. And he would often be in touch with the President three or four times a day by phone. But then he would often go over in the late afternoon and talk things out with the President. Or if there was some particularly urgent issue he would go and see the President on that specifically.

He was in constant touch with the President and when he was abroad on his various trips, on negotiations for example, every evening he would send a personal cable to Eisenhower

telling what had been done during that day in brief form, a page or two, and what he intended to do the next day. And he expected Ike, if he had any questions about the way he was going, to tell him. And he did. Eisenhower would cable: I think it would be wiser not to do this or to do that. But I repeat, he was not second-guessing basically. I think the two men fundamentally talked things out enough so that they did see things similarly, were on the same wave length. And Dulles was meticulous in making sure that he didn't do things that he thought were not what the President wanted. He didn't do any running around end or anything of that sort.

Q: Could we look now at a few of the areas where you obviously were very much involved. How did you and the policy planning staff view the Soviet Union in the period you were there?

BOWIE: Well, as you may remember, Stalin died almost immediately after Eisenhower took office. I think it was March, wasn't it, '53? And in a month or so, Eisenhower decided he would have a major exercise to consider what ought to be the general policy towards the Soviet Union. And he started something called the Solarium Exercise. This was based on the notion of having three teams, each of about five or six, who would be given a particular approach to the Soviet Union and would make the best case they could for it, analyzing the purposes of the Soviet Union and what our interests were, what our means of influencing it were. And one of these teams, by the way, was headed by George Kennan.

Q: So I've often heard that Dulles sort of turned his back, I meadismissed Kennan out of hand?

BOWIE: Well, there was certainly not a good feeling between them because there had been some sort of a misunderstanding. I think shortly after the Administration took office George, who had been—I think he'd been at the War College—I believe he went out and made a public speech which was highly critical, essentially, of views which he attributed to

Dulles. And Dulles took this amiss and I think the result was that he simply let Kennan go. But some of the people on these task forces were brought in from outside the government, and so Kennan actually was asked to head the team which was given the task of making the case for containment. And then there were two others. It's not worth getting into those. But they were different ways of dealing with the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], including roll-back.

Q: Roll-back?

BOWIE: This was the idea that we would pressure the Soviets to force them to retract their power, particularly in Eastern Europe, which was an idea which had been talked about in the campaign.

These teams had about three or four weeks to prepare the material, then there was a full presentation before members of the Cabinet and before the assistant secretaries and the Planning Board, almost all the top military officers and a number of other people. And at the end of it the President made his own statement.

Q: The President was at the presentation?

BOWIE: Oh, yes. It was principally for him and the members of the NSC. At a meeting in Princeton a couple of weeks ago for the 100th anniversary of Dulles' birth, which Kennan once more repeated what I had heard him say before, that at the end Eisenhower made an extemporaneous summary of his reactions. Kennan said it showed that he had no peer in the room, that he really had a grasp of the subject which was outstanding. And from George that's quite a high compliment.

In any event, this was the first effort to take a look at Soviet policy, and on the basis of those reports, there was discussion in the NSC. Then we prepared a paper in the NSC Planning Board which was later approved in the NSC which was the First National Strategy Paper (NSC 162/2). Well, by chance in preparing for this conference at

Princeton a couple of weeks ago, I went over some of these documents which have been declassified and I reread 162/2 which was prepared in October 1953 - it was the document that took account of this Solarium exercise and was the first so-called National Security Strategy Paper or something of that order. And it was essentially a presentation of our broader set of purposes but also in particular our approach to the Soviet Union. And I think reading it over it was a pretty balanced approach. Essentially it took the view that the Soviet Union was not at all likely to launch any aggressive war in Europe, that it had very substantial military capabilities but it would try to use them politically to extend its influence; that it was engaged in trying broadly to extend its influence wherever it could; that it was on the whole cautious in its pursuit of that purpose but nevertheless unflagging; that its control of the satellites at that point was firm and was not likely to be disrupted because of its military capability to put down any uprisings.

With respect to China, it took the view that its relation with the USSR then was close and cooperative but that over time it seemed unlikely that this would be able to persist, that there were almost sure to be cleavages because of the somewhat different interests of the Soviet Union and China, and that it was quite likely that over time there would be a fissure in that relationship. Not predicting any time, but simply taking the view that it was not forever a solid kind of relationship.

And then the general approach, as I said, stressed our interest in trying to promote development in the developing world, our interest in trying to promote European integration, the importance of NATO as a basis of containment. Toward the USSR, I would say that in general the paper carried forward the basic concept of containment as formulated in the Truman Administration but modified the military strategy to take account of the growing nuclear capability, and to incorporate the “New Look”.

I think looking back that it was a pretty balanced appraisal and noextreme or very doctrinaire.

Q: The historians are always revising themselves, looking back on it, but at the time were there any opportunities that maybe we missed of defusing the Cold War? Or do you think that was in the cards in those days?

BOWIE: I don't think there were any missed opportunities myself. But of course as you say, trying to construct alternative theories of history, it's all speculation. You remember an early claim about a lost opportunity in 1952 when the Soviets sent a note to the Truman Administration in which they seemed to say, why don't we discuss the unification of Germany and neutralization of Germany and so on. And this was entirely out of line with the general Western effort to construct Europe that included Germany and the Truman Administration didn't pursue it. Some, including some German historians, treat this as a lost opportunity. I don't think so myself. I don't think at that point the Soviet Union dared to liquidate East Germany. I think what they were trying to do was to start a discussion which they hoped would derail the efforts to create a more unified Europe and NATO, and which didn't necessarily require that they pursue it, if they could get a discussion going which would create tensions and turmoil in Germany itself. Because at that time Schumacher you remember, and his party, was strongly opposed to the integration of Germany into the European Community and into NATO. And I'm sure they thought—

Q: Schumacher was the Socialist—

BOWIE: He was the leader of the SPD. And I can't remember exactly, he died relatively early on, but his party continued the same policy until '58.

Well, my own feeling is that after the death of Stalin the Soviet leaders were very much caught up in their own turmoil about who was to predominate, who was to be the leader. They began with collective leadership, and you remember they put Malenkov in charge to start with, but it was perfectly clear from what went on later that there was constant turmoil among them, and struggle to see who would prevail until Khrushchev took over in about '56. But you remember they shot Beria very early on because he was obviously trying

to use the Secret Police as a means of taking charge. They went long for a while under Malenkov, then they demoted him, put in Bulganin, who was nominally in charge at the time of the Summit meeting in '55 in Geneva. But at that meeting while Bulganin was the spokesman, Khrushchev, who was also there, was very self-confident and pretty clearly the principal member of the delegation, although he was not nominally so. About a year later he essentially asserted his authority and, you'll remember, put down the so-called anti-party plot in which some of the others had attempted to oust him.

Our view then was that during that period the Soviets were not in any position to take any explicit initiatives of any major sort. They were interested in keeping things calm, not letting relations with the West get tense, so they conducted a sort of peace initiative. And as a part of that, after NATO finally took in the Germans in '55, they agreed to the Austrian state treaty which had been held up by them for 10 years.In short, my feeling was that through '56 the Soviets were not in a position, just because the leadership hadn't yet been settled, to make any major changes in the ongoing policy. What they did do was try, as I said, to remove a certain number of lesser disputes or frictions inherited from Stalin, including such things as the Austrian state treaty. But I don't think they were in a position to make a major change. The West had various meetings with them including one, the Foreign Ministers meeting, in January and February of '54—

Q: Berlin.

BOWIE: Berlin, in which we discussed the whole question of German unification and the situation in Europe. And it was very clear that Molotov was simply not prepared to make any major change which would possibly imperil the continuance of Eastern Germany. Various proposals were made by him that there be some sort of confederation between the East Germans and the West Germans but they were clearly not going to go on and make decisions about whether or not you had elections and how and so on. It was perfectly clear that East Germany wasn't going to commit suicide and these were all just devices for trying to create discord in the West. But fortunately there was a unified view

across the board, the French and the British and ourselves, and also the Germans under Adenauer, that we shouldn't be sucked into something that was a mirage.

So I repeat, certainly we didn't think at the time that there was any opportunity that we missed and on the basis of hindsight, trying to reflect on it, I don't see any.

Q: Did you have on your policy planning staff somebody sort of looking for signals? I mean, was the thought that we don't want to miss this if it comes up but just to have somebody sort of you in-house dove or something like that?

BOWIE: Didn't have anybody explicitly designated for that purpose, but we were all constantly reappraising, you know, what was the situation vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, what were the Soviet purposes and whether or not there were changes. It was recognized that there were certain changes in the Soviet Union after Stalin, particularly after Khrushchev came into power there was a loosening up and so on. And certainly there was an end to the use of purges in the way in which Stalin had done. Except for the shooting of Beria, when they decided to demote one of the leaders, as in the case of Malenkov, they sent him off to a minor job.

Q: Hydroelectric station.

BOWIE: But he continued to live and make his way. And the same was true even when they came later on to toss out Khrushchev. As a matter of fact, I think Khrushchev, after he has been demoted, removed as the head of the government and the party, says that perhaps his major contribution to the Soviet Union was that he had helped create an atmosphere in which a leader could be demoted and still be allowed to live and to simply retire. And I think that's true, that was a very profound change in the whole political culture in the Soviet Union which, you know, was a real milestone. And they haven't gone back on that. They're not essentially engaged in anything remotely like Stalin's way of governing.

Q: Was the NSC involved, not really the NSC, the policy planning staff, involved in sort of crisis management? Let's say when there were the riots in East Berlin and the Hungarian Revolution?

BOWIE: Well, as I indicated, as head of the policy planning staff I was free to attend any meeting I wanted, and so when meetings were held about Hungary, obviously I took part. I can't really say that the Policy Planning Staff, as such, made some unique contribution to these kinds of things, but we tried—the Hungary case was terribly frustrating because the truth was we didn't see how we could do anything useful at that point to significantly change what was going on.

Q: Right from the beginning this was almost self-understood?

BOWIE: Pretty much I think. I think there were some people in thgovernment who sort of thought—

Q: This is the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

BOWIE: 1956, yes. And there were some people I think who felt that we could at least do things which were more like gestures, like dropping supplies and things like that. But I think that Eisenhower and Dulles thought that those kinds of gestures might even make the Hungarians think that we were going to do more than we were and that they were therefore ill advised because they might just help cause people to sacrifice themselves under a misapprehension of the degree to which we were going to help. And I think realistically the conclusion was that if you tried to intervene you risked a third world war because of the fact that the control of the Soviet Empire at that time was seen as so vital to their own interests. And if it appeared that the West was really trying to undermine that control in a forceful way, it could produce the kind of a conflict that nobody wanted.

Q: Did Dulles sort of acknowledge that he was having to sort of backtrack on some of the rhetoric? You know, there was talk about rolling back Eastern Europe and he—

BOWIE: I think the truth is that that had been buried at the time of the Solarium Exercise in '53. As I said, one of the task forces in that exercise was given the job of making the best case for essentially trying to roll back Soviet power. And in the discussions of the results of those presentations, and in NSC 162/2, that was simply not pursued. And therefore, to tell the truth, I don't think it was ever a live possibility under Eisenhower, and I think part of his purpose in the Solarium Exercise was to make sure that everybody understood that the basic policy was containment and not roll-back. And of course that was underscored with the riots in East Berlin in June 1953 when there was rioting and the West simply did not try to intervene, for the same reason, which as I said, later on caused people not to think it wise to try to intervene in Hungary. So I don't really think by the time of Hungary that this was thought of at all as a live possibility.

Let me say this. I don't think that meant that people assumed that control by the Soviet Union of Eastern Europe was forever, but I think that what they recognized was that it would have to be domestic or internal forces and historical forces and the ferment within the system over quite a long time which would ultimately probably change the relationship between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. So it wasn't assumed that this was going to be the status quo forever, but it was certainly recognized that it was not going to be changed by anything we did specifically directed to that end and was certainly not going to change in any short time.

Q: Turning from here to several other areas of particular interest, one is during the Suez crises, how was the policy planning staff—what were you doing during what both led up it, the Aswan dam, and the denial of assistance there, which was said to have sort of instigated it?

BOWIE: I can only give you a very brief comment on it, but of course in connection with the NSC process we had had several studies of the Middle East as such. And so there was a reasonable grasp, I think, of the tension among the nationalist aspirations of the Arabs, particularly led by Nasser; the interest of particularly the U.K., United Kingdom, in trying to maintain its historical position in the area, which was based very heavily on its relations with Jordan and with Iraq; the Western interest in trying to create a basis of containment in the area through the Baghdad Pact, which was of course objected to by some of the Arabs like Nasser because of the feeling that it was really an instrumentality for maintenance of Western influence; and then the Arab-Israeli conflict. So I mean it was recognized as a result of these earlier NSC papers that this was a very complex mix of forces and pressures and so on.

The West, the U.S. in particular, was trying to do two things. It was trying to see if we couldn't resolve the Arab-Israeli issue, and that was the subject of extensive efforts called Alpha, in cooperation with the U.K., trying to find a formula which would make it possible to arrive at peace between the Arabs and Israel. And in the end both Israel and the Arabs were unwilling to play ball. That, for example, that specific exercise, was largely in the hands of NEA, the Near Eastern Bureau, and their counterparts in the U.K. So while the Policy Planning Staff took part in commenting on these things, this was pretty much looked on as an operational kind of thing.

Second, the hope was to find a way to get on with Nasser, recognizing the pressure of Arab nationalism but trying to avoid damage to Western interests from Nasser's pursuit of it. And this in the early stage was in cooperation with the British. But of course the British saw themselves as losing their position in the area under the pressure of Arab nationalism; they more and more tended to personalize it, as a result of Nasser's activity, and they tried to solidify their positions in Jordan and in Iraq and to use the Baghdad pact as an instrument to maintain their position in the area.

And this was a source of some tension between us and them because we thought they were perhaps overdoing it in trying to bring the Jordanians into the Pact and also in bringing Iran into the Pact. And we irritated them because while we backed the Pact, we wouldn't join it partly because we felt that if we did we'd then have to do something for Israel and this would further alienate the Arabs and so on. All I'm trying to suggest is that there was a very keen understanding of what a complex situation it was.

And the Aswan dam proposal was one of the efforts to try to see if wcould bring Nasser into a more cooperative relationship.

Q: For the record, could you describe very briefly what the Aswadam—.

BOWIE: Yes, this was a proposal that the United States, U.K. and the World Bank cooperate in providing the foreign financing, the foreign assistance, which was required for the building of a major dam on the Nile which would be both for irrigation and power. This was something that Nasser was very much interested in. It was going to be an enormous undertaking which required I think $1.3 billion, or something of that sort, of which a very large part had to come from domestic, internal resources of Egypt but of which I think $400 million had to come from outside, foreign exchange. And that's what the U.S., U.K. and the World Bank were going to provide.

This proposal came right after Nasser had made the deal for Czech arms, which really were Soviet arms, which of course was very upsetting to Western purposes in the area because it would raise problems then about the arming of Israel and so on. Still, in cooperation with the U.K., and really under pressure by the U.K., the U.S. and the Bank offered to finance this dam in December of '55. Then negotiations took place over the coming months and Nasser tried to improve the conditions that were offered. And he also objected very much to some of the requirements that the Bank said it had to have in order to make certain that Egypt did in fact devote the resources that were going to be required to the completion of the dam, if it was built.

More and more, Nasser was acting in ways which were seen as damaging on the Western side during the spring of '56. And finally Congress was becoming more and more hostile to using American funds for this purpose, responding to a variety of pressure groups. Cotton growers in the South thought that this irrigation would increase the amount of long-staple cotton and be damaging to them. Supporters of Israel saw this as building up Nasser. Nasser recognized Communist China in about May or a little earlier and that alienated the China lobby.

As I say, there was growing disillusion with Nasser and doubts about the ability to work with him, particularly over the decade, which would be required for construction of the dam, a feeling that if you carried through you might very well have so much friction over handling it and completing it that you not get any political benefit from it but would get hostility. And finally Congress threatened to pass legislation which would have actually forbidden the use of any funds from foreign aid to support the dam. So in the middle of July Dulles finally, in consultation with the British, decided that they would simply withdraw the offer. And this of course was seen by Nasser as highly offensive: he considered it as a reflection, an effort to denigrate him; a week later, he nationalized the Suez Canal Company.

Q: Well, was the policy planning staff involved much in saying whaeffect this might have?

BOWIE: Well, as I told you, the way things worked, the staff worked on a variety of things including the question of relations with Egypt and so on. And we did studies, particularly internal studies, and I took part in the various key meetings. I don't particularly remember any meeting dealing with the actual making of the offer, but I do remember very well the meeting that took place before the final decision to withdraw the offer. There was essentially a canvassing of the pros and cons of canceling it, or going forward. And our hand was forced, that is to say we had to take a decision, because Nasser decided to send his ambassador, who had been in Cairo, back to the United States for the specific purpose of saying that he would now take the dam offer without the conditions that

he had previously proposed. So he was trying to force our hand at that point, I think suspecting that we would not be able to go forward, or not be willing to go forward.But I can remember well the meeting that was held with the Secretary to discuss the pros and cons. As I remember, we certainly tried to contribute the element of what was likely to be the longer-term effect of withdrawal; I wouldn't suggest to you that we anticipated he would nationalize the canal company, because we didn't, but we certainly recognized that he would take it hard and that it was going to make relations with Egypt difficult. And indeed in the meeting we discussed the character of the communique regarding the withdrawal and I remember urging very strongly that we write it as far as we could in such a way to be conciliatory rather than confrontational. And I think I had some considerable role, as I remember it, in redrafting the communique for that purpose. So, I mean, the purpose was not to confront Nasser in the sense of trying to humiliate him, but on the contrary to try to present the decision, for all the various reasons I've given, not to go forward—and recognizing of course that this would be taken very badly by him—nevertheless try to present it in a way which said essentially we remain friends with Egypt, we want to provide help in other forms and so on.

And actually when Dulles met with the ambassador, who himself was very anxious and had worked hard to try to improve relations between Egypt and the United States - he had a perfectly civilized meeting and tried to explain in detail that we were not trying to humiliate Nasser, but obviously that didn't affect the fact that Nasser felt that it was a real affront.

Q: How did you, and I'm saying you, both you personally and on the Policy Planning Staff, view Israel in those days as basically a domestic political given that we had to accept or did you see it as a positive influence in the area?

BOWIE: No. I think there was certainly an awareness of a strong support for Israel, especially in certain quarters, and that this was a political reality. There were certainly no hostility to Israel in the sense it was taken as a fact that Israel existed and was entitled

to be secure and exist along with the others in the area. But I think the Administration came into office feeling that the Truman Administration had tilted much too much in favor of Israel and that therefore they thought of themselves as trying to adopt a more even-handed policy toward Israel and toward the Arabs. I don't think they saw Israel as a strategic asset, there was none of that - there was no belief that Israel was a valuable asset. There was certainly a feeling that there was a definite commitment to Israel which would be honored, which was based as much as anything on sympathy, on history and on other things. So there was no idea of undercutting Israel or abandoning Israel, but there was a very strong feeling that we also had a very great interest in relations with the Arabs and that it was necessary not to ignore that to the degree that it had been perhaps ignored in the previous administration. But I think the formula that was adopted, and I think was meant, was more even-handed treatment of the Arabs and Israelis and a real effort, very intensive effort to arrive at some formula for peace between the Arabs and Israel which would assure the security of Israel and acceptance of Israel in the area and at the same time end the hostility and the feeling of threat by the Arabs which certainly was also true at the time; the conflict itself was seen as an inevitable obstacle to more stability in the area and to good relations with the Arabs, given the American commitment to Israel, which was indeed going to be honored.

Q: Going to the Suez war of 1956, did you or the policy planninstaff become involved in the rather fast-moving period then?

BOWIE: In the—

Q: During the Israel, French and British attack on Egypt.

BOWIE: And I didn't quite get what was the question.

Q: Well, your personal involvement, Policy Planning Staff.

BOWIE: All through this period after the nationalizing of the Canal Company, I took part in many of the conferences like the London conference in August to try to develop a common position for the solution to the problem, and thereafter in the various meetings, obviously within the Department but also many of those which were held internationally. And so I'd simply say that the policy planning staff was one player in the efforts to formulate policy. I differed somewhat in August with the line which was taken. At the London meeting the U.S. went along with and helped develop a plan for international operation, operation of the canal by an international agency. And it seemed to me that this was a non-starter, because of the fact that it would require Nasser essentially to turn over the canal to the control of an international agency and would therefore amount to a reversal of his nationalizing of the canal company. And I thought that we could get sufficient protection by a series of safeguards on the fixing of tolls, access to the canal, having a voice in selecting the manager, and so on. In other words, rather more specific kinds of safeguards which would still leave the canal nominally or in fact in charge of Egypt but subject to a variety of safeguards like those of a regulatory agency in this country for assuring that the control couldn't be abused. And I thought that was conceivably saleable, particularly as Nasser became more concerned about the threat from the British and French and also because I think he gradually became aware that if he was going to get the revenues which he was looking forward to from the canal he was going to have international confidence that the canal was reliable and would be run in a way that made it usable commercially. And so it seemed to me that you could probably get him to agree to a fair number of safeguards which would probably be adequate.

Recently, I've had the opportunity to go over the documents as I wrote a piece on Suez. I was amazed to discover that Eisenhower shared this view. I had not known it at the time. But Dulles sent a cable from the London meeting on Suez telling Eisenhower they were planning on having an international agency run the canal and Eisenhower sent back a cable saying that he thought Nasser would find this very difficult to accept and that he wondered whether we wouldn't be sufficiently safeguarded by supervisory control rather

than direct ownership by an international agency. Dulles then cabled back that he thought he'd pushed the British about as far as he could and essentially that they might very well jump ship if he pushed them further. And then Eisenhower sent back a cable saying, well, you're on the firing line, I'll have to abide by your judgment and I'll approve whatever you think is necessary. But I was quite fascinated that his judgment was the same as mine.

Q: Then did you get involved in, you know, during that brief wathere and the Soviet threat of rattling rockets and all that?

BOWIE: My memory—bear in mind now that I don't have the kind of memory that can recall every meeting I ever attended or all the conversations I ever held—I simply can remember the general way in which things went except in some instances, like the one dealing with the cancellation of the dam offer, I happen to remember that. But in connection with this episode, after the attack by the French and the British and the Israelis, I think about five or six days after that the Soviets did send a rather vague but threatening note saying how would you feel if rockets fell, and so on. Not quite threatening, but I think it's fair to say that on our side we didn't take it seriously, we didn't think the Soviets were going to launch any weapons. And I don't think the British took it seriously. Certainly the U.S. immediately indicated that as far as this was concerned this would invoke NATO and we would consider it necessary to respond. So really it simply didn't cause great heartburn on our side because we did not really think that they were serious and, second, we didn't have the slightest doubt that if they did we would respond.

As I say, I don't believe the British reacted to this either. The truth was that at the very same time the run on the pound was creating a financial problem which was impossible for them. And Eisenhower was simply saying, we will not help you until you agree that you will withdraw. And Macmillan finally threw in the towel and decided that they simply could not face the consequences, financial consequences.

Q: It was Eden, wasn't it?

BOWIE: Well, Macmillan was in charge of the Exchequer at that timand he advised Eden that they simply couldn't stand the pressure.

Doug Dillon still thinks - I saw him at this Princeton conference two weeks ago - that the French were influenced by it. He says that he was summoned to a late night or midnight meeting of the French Cabinet. He was, you remember, ambassador there. U.S. ambassador.

But when I talked to him about it he said, well, during his first conversation in this meeting with Mollet about the threat, Mollet got a call from Eden and after the call Mollet told Dillon that Eden had told him that they were going to have to stop and capitulate because of the pound, the threat to the pound. And that therefore the French would also have to stop because they couldn't go on without the British. But Dillon still seems to think that they were motivated in part at least by the threat of Soviet bombs. I think that they've always used that as an explanation because it is less humiliating than to say we couldn't go ahead without the British. But I can't answer that for sure. But as far as we were concerned, and personally I think as far as the British were concerned, the Soviet threat was not a factor.

Q: I'd to now turn to Southeast Asia and then we'll talk about China. With Indochina, in 1954 I've been told by someone who has examined the records that early in the year Dulles did not think Indochina was very important to American interests, but during the crisis at Dien Bien Phu he began to stress the need to support the French. How did Dulles seem to view Indochina during this crisis? The French role in Indochina?

BOWIE: Well, I think it had several dimensions. I think, as Dulles saw it, our primary interest was the French role in Europe. Remember the Schuman Plan had been launched and started operating and then the European Defense Community had been proposed by France, which was a form of European army as a means of bringing Germany into the defense of the West. That had been proposed in late 1950 and had been drafted and put into form of a possible treaty but the French had not ratified it and were dragging their feet.

In terms of priorities, I think Dulles was especially concerned about the fact that Indochina was affecting to some extent the French willingness to go forward with this initiative in Europe, the European Defense Community in Europe. And therefore the U.S. was willing to come to the support of France with very large amounts of money to try to reduce at least the financial burden of the Indochina war. And there was proposed, I think it was in the fall of '53, something called the Navarre Plan, which was named for the French general who was then in charge in Indochina, which was supposed to be a strategy for bringing the war to an end in about 18 months or two years, I think it was. And the U.S. put in a very large amount of money, I think it was about $400 million, to assist this effort. This was seen as kind of a last-ditch effort to resolve the problem.

The U.S. felt very much that the French conduct of the Indochina war was not very effective because the U.S. felt that it just had to be conducted in such a way that the Indochinese, Vietnam and the others, would feel that it was really leading on to their independence and not the reassertion of French dominance or colonialism. And one of the tensions was that we kept pressing the French to make much more clear than they had done the fact that at the end of the war Vietnam and the others would get their full independence. Obviously, the French were largely fighting this war for the purpose of reestablishing their own position in the area so there was inevitable conflict there between what we thought to be the essential condition for an effective conduct of the war and their actual interest in the war.

Q: So we looked upon Indochina as, well, Vietnam, as being reallmore tied to getting the French in Europe rather than—

BOWIE: I meant to say that was one aspect. Now, I think there was also the concern about the danger of communism spreading outward. I don't mean to minimize that, there was also that as a separate factor. And the belief, at least, that China was very much supporting this. Remember this followed Korea—there had been the attack in 1950 in Korea and that was seen as engineered, I think probably mistakenly, by the Chinese

because later the Chinese came in. I think there was much more cooperation between North Korea and the Soviet Union than there was with China. But nevertheless the image was, particularly since the Chinese had entered the war, the Korean war at a crucial time, that this was a Chinese effort at expansionism. And so when the Korean war ended, the focus was somewhat greater on what happened in Indochina, looking on it as if it were a further effort at extension by China.

So the Indochinese war was seen as part of the effort to maintain the expansion of China, of communism. And that was certainly a substantial part of the readiness to support the French in the war.

And I think there was another political element here. The Republicans had, remember, made a campaign issue of the, quotes, loss of China, by the Democrats, supposedly. And this was not talked about but I can't help but think that both Dulles and Eisenhower didn't want to be subject to the charge of having lost Indochina to the Communists. So this was a further element, quite aside, I think, from the question of the strategic importance of the area. As time went on, the notion of the dominoes, that if Indochina was lost or if Vietnam was lost, then there would be—

Q: Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, India.

BOWIE: All the other southern tier countries. And Indochina. I don't know how strongly this was actually felt. I really just don't know. It's very hard for me to get back into the mood of that time and to really know whether that was being used as a makeway, as a justification for the very large sums which were being made available for Indochina, or whether there really was a belief that there would be this domino effect. I just don't know.

Q: Dulles was talking about some sort of united action, I believe.Was he serious about this in Indochina?

BOWIE: I think you have to look at this in context. At the Berlin session with the Soviets in January, February of 1954, which was primarily devoted to the discussion of Europe and of Germany, the issue of Indochina came up. And finally the French agreed at that time that there would be a conference on Indochina in, I guess it was in June or July, or maybe a little earlier, May, and from that time on the situation of the French in Indochina deteriorated. The Navarre Plan didn't work out as had been hoped and the French forces concentrated at Dien Bien Phu.

Q: Tape two, side one of an interview with Dr. Bowie on the 15th oMarch, 1988.

BOWIE: We were talking about the gradual decline of the French position in Indochina during the spring of 1954. And as I said, as the time for this conference on Indochina in Geneva approached, Dulles became more and more aware of the fact that the French were practically naked and without any real strength from which to negotiate a solution in Indochina. And I think he felt, therefore, that the likely outcome would be that the French would just throw in the sponge and that the whole of Indochina would be lost. I think that he felt that this would be very damaging, both in the region itself and in the sort of broader implications as the wave of the future kind of thing.

I think it was pretty clear that Eisenhower was not going to intervene with American forces and the British were very clear, I think he understood this, that they were not going to intervene at that point before the Geneva conference. But at the same time he was trying to find some way to bolster the negotiating position of the West. In my opinion the speech which he made, I think it was at the end of March, 1954, about how the West must meet this by united action, was intended to create an atmosphere and some activity which would give the Soviets and the Chinese pause about pushing too far at the Geneva meeting.

As I recall it, I went with him when he went to see Eden after this united action speech. And what he suggested was, I think, that they consider the possibility of creating some sort of a pact, a coalition, which would essentially be willing to defend whatever settlement

came out of the Indochina conference. But that they would start steps toward such a pact after he got back, which was in the middle of April, as I remember it, so that the Soviets and the Chinese would be sort of aware that there was the possibility that the West just might be triggered into doing something if they pushed too far. So in my opinion that was the fundamental purpose of this united action speech and also of the steps that he wanted to take afterwards.

As a result of the trip to London, Eden agreed, at least as Dulles understood it, that these initial steps would be taken, not with the idea of actually intervening before the meeting, but with the idea of starting to create some sort of an organization which the Soviets and the Chinese might not know exactly what you were trying to do. And when Dulles tried to call a meeting right after his return, Eden ordered his ambassador not to attend. And Dulles felt this was a renege on what had been promised by Eden in London. And I think this was one source of distrust—they had never been terribly close.

Q: I was going to say—

BOWIE: But this I think undercut Dulles' confidence in Eden because I think he felt that Eden had taken a commitment, then had reneged under pressure either by India—I think there was some sort of a meeting of the Commonwealth about to be held. Or maybe it had been pressure from the Cabinet. But in any event Dulles was convinced that Eden had not only reneged but had denied reneging, in other words, I think he'd have felt differently if Eden had given him an explanation: “I agreed and I can't carry through”, or something like that. But he didn't. He in effect implied that he hadn't agreed. My memory is I thought that Eden had agreed to this degree, not to intervene but to go through the gestures and through the steps.

In any event, I think for the same purpose Dulles kept only partially involved in the conference and created a feeling of hovering in the background. I think this was again for the purpose of making the Soviets and the Chinese uneasy about whether the Americans

just might be pushed too far, might react if they pressed too far. I personally think this was part of the reason for actually getting the deal that they got at Geneva; and some people have said that there is evidence that the Soviets and the Chinese put great pressure on the North Vietnamese not to push beyond the agreed parallel as a basis for the settlement, for fear that it might provoke some reaction. But Eden thought that he had apparently got the deal by the fact that he got on so well with the Soviets but I think that he got the deal he was able to make partly because of their uneasiness about this club behind the door. And it's interesting that Evelyn Shuckburgh's memoirs, Evelyn was in charge of Middle Eastern policy for the British—

Q: This is The Descent to Suez.

BOWIE: Yes, The Descent to Suez. He shows a clear understanding of what Dulles was doing and said, why don't we take advantage of it. And implied also, as I recall it, that Eden didn't get the point.

Q: At this point, could I ask—not only in Indochina but other times, did the policy planning staff ever seriously consider the nuclear option for any solution to anything?

BOWIE: No. On the contrary. Of course the nuclear option in the sense of a nuclear component in the larger deterrent was very much a part of the thinking and the whole strategy, so I'm not talking about that, but you're talking I presume about the actual use of nuclear weapons in some crisis.

Q: Yes. For a crisis rather than a big war.

BOWIE: Well, the one case I can remember where this became a real possibility was at the time of Quemoy and Matsu in 1954. I'd simply say that as far as I'm concerned, I do not think that the nuclear weapon was ever seriously considered as an option at the time of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam in May of 1954. I don't think that Eisenhower would

have contemplated that because I think he would have thought it was both futile and counterproductive.

At the time of Quemoy-Matsu, which followed not too long after '54, you remember the Nationalist Chinese held these very small islands which were not very far from the coast of China and Chiang Kai-shek had put a very large part of his forces on the islands and saw them as symbols of his determination to return to the Mainland. It was very clear the United States did not take his return to the Mainland at all as a serious possibility. But when the Chinese began to shell the islands and seemed to threaten that they might try to take the islands, this was seen as a test of containment - as to whether or not they would by force be able to throw out Western power or a power supported by the West from these small islands. And in the discussions of what to do, the air force said, well, the way to deal with this is to drop small nuclear weapons on the airfields, the Chinese Mainland airfields, which would be necessary to achieve air dominance or air cover in the case of any attempt at an invasion of the islands.

This was not a specific action to be taken at the moment because they had not invaded the islands, but this was at least the proposed way of reacting to that if it occurred. And I was very concerned by the implications of this because this was an area which was heavily populated and while the air force claimed that it could make surgical strikes on the airfields, I felt sure that the amount of casualties would be very serious. So I arranged for a presentation to be made based on the weapons' effects which were determined by the AEC [Atomic Energy Commission]. They had made studies of weapons' effects in terms of the various circles of effect - impact from blast and heat and radiation. So we took the size of weapons, which was quite small by most standards, which were being talked about by the air force to take out the airfields, and we got from the CIA the Chinese population distribution in the area involved. And we plotted to show what would be the consequences of these various air strikes in terms of casualties. I don't remember the numbers now, but it ran into the millions.

So I had this presented to Dulles to be sure that he fully understood the implications of this course and how horrifying it would be that for the protection of these small islands you would be inflicting these very large numbers of casualties. He never said what the consequence was in his mind of this presentation, but I always had the feeling that it certainly made him extremely reluctant to move in that direction. But I will simply say that as far as policy and planning was concerned, we were doing everything to show that this was not a wise policy.

Q: About China, how did you personally feel about China?

BOWIE: Can I have one more minute and then I'll be right back.

Q: We were talking about how you viewed China, the two Chinas.

BOWIE: Certainly I think as far as the policy and planning staff were concerned, they took it for granted that the Communist regime on the Mainland was in charge and solidly in control. There was no expectation that Chiang would be able to return to the Mainland or take over all of China. It was understood, from our point of view, that this stance was merely one that was for morale of the Chinese Nationalists.

At the same time, I don't think we assumed that Communist China was going to stumble or fall apart or anything of that sort. As I said to you earlier, as early as October of '53, the analysis in NSC 162/2 was that while the alliance between China and the Soviet Union at that point was strong, in the longer run there was going to be friction and tension and perhaps more. The policy, I think, was to put pressure on China, partly for the purpose of forcing it to depend on the Soviet Union. In other words, it was felt that to the extent the Chinese had to make demands on the Soviet Union, they would be more of a burden on the Soviet Union, and second that the Soviets would not be able fully to meet the demands and therefore that the possibility of increasing tensions was there, although one couldn't be sure what form they would take. And I don't think there was any expectation or hope that

this would produce any short-run consequences, but it was going to add to the possibility, as I said, of gradual cleavages, gradual tensions, gradual emergence of differences in national interest.

And that was the basis on which there was an effort to keep China out of the U.N. and also keep the COCOM restrictions; the restrictions on strategic trade with China, as I recall it, were more stringent than they were on the Soviet Union. So the result was that the Chinese had to get whatever they wanted through the USSR. We understood that they could get it through the Soviet Union but inevitably that made them dependent on the Soviets and made them more demanding of the Soviets.

The policy of the Administration, in other words, was to isolate China, to contain China, to put pressures of whatever sort you could on China, without I think undue hopes or expectations. I think the only aspect I differed on that was that it seemed to me that we were using up an enormous amount of effort to keep China out of the U.N. every year.

Q: Is this—we tried to force every country to vote against the issue?

BOWIE: Yes. We had to try to twist arms so that they could never get a majority in order to get in the U.N. As I remember it, my own view was that it made more sense from our point of view not to use up all this political capital but essentially to try to cut a deal with the other countries that we would not object to the Chinese coming into the General Assembly but that the position of Taiwan was not to be disturbed. This wasn't strictly logical but it was just ad hoc as far as I was concerned. And I thought that the Chinese would then say, well, we're not going to come in on that basis and therefore the situation would relax. But if they did come in it wouldn't make any difference.

This, however, was strongly opposed by Walter Robertson who was in charge of the Far East as Assistant Secretary. And when I tried to raise this in the Planning Board of the NSC as a subject to discuss, he insisted that he and I talk about it with Dulles before I

went further with it, and objected to Dulles at my pursuit of this at all. And Dulles decided that he would prefer that I did not pursue it in the Planning Board, so I dropped it.

My own feeling was that this involved the relations with the right wing of the Republican Party, as you remember the right wing was absolutely committed to Chiang.

Q: Speaking of Senators Knowland and, was it Judd—

BOWIE: Judd and—there were three or four of them.

Q: Three or four, yes.

BOWIE: But they had also the supposed backing of quite a large pressure group in the population generally which they had mobilized. And I think that one of the problems that Dulles and Eisenhower both felt they had in the conduct of a sensible foreign policy was to keep these people from blocking what they wanted to do or creating undue problems for them because they were figures in the Republican party. And my sense of it was that Dulles and Eisenhower tried to keep these people quiet by throwing them verbal bones and acquiescing in certain things which neither Eisenhower nor Dulles thought were terribly important, so as to have a free hand to deal with the other things which they did feel important. And I think this decision of Dulles about China may partly have been based on his strategy of trying to keep pressure on China: maybe forcing them to use the Soviets as their spokesmen in the U.N. may have been part of that. I wouldn't exclude that as a possibility. But I think also a factor was that he didn't think this was terribly important to American foreign policy and was prepared to use up some capital to try to keep out the Chinese. And he could easily get the backing of this right wing to do what he thought was the right current policy of pressure on China, but if he in any way indicated some acceptance of China by letting them in the U.N., even though it was purely pragmatic, I think he thought he would stir the right wing people up and get them on his neck. I'm not saying he shared my view, and he may well have thought it was a mistake for substantive

reasons, but I think on top of that there surely was the element that this was simply going to bring down a lot of trouble on him and wasn't worth it.

Q: Our time is running out now, so—

BOWIE: We've got another 10 minutes.

Q: All right. Well, what was the role of Walter Robertson? In youexperience, your dealings with him.

BOWIE: Well, Robertson was quite genuinely a Southern gentleman. He was really the soul of courtesy and a very decent, fine person. He was absolutely committed to the support of Chiang Kai-shek and to the conviction that the Chinese Communists were a source of evil. And so he dedicated himself to whatever could be done to maintain the position and American support for Chiang and to oppose anything which in any way suggested or implied acceptance of Communist China. And those were the guidelines which he pursued whatever the situation. And of course he was really dedicated to this cause. But Robertson was too decent a person to be a real zealot in the sense in which we've seen in the last couple of years, few years. For example he knew very well, as this little episode indicated, that from time to time I'd taken a different view about China, not that I had illusions about China. I didn't think we were going to have a friendship with China at that stage, but it was just a question of how much resources you devoted and how much you still nurtured what to me was the total illusion about Chiang's real role. I saw no reason either why we should abandon Chiang or Taiwan, but still it was a question really of perception, of what was the role, what was the future.

Still, what I was about to say was that when I announced in '57 that I was going to leave and go back to Harvard, the first person to come up and say how sorry he was to see me leave was Walter Robertson, just because he was capable of separating personal relations from his strong policy views. So I was fond of him, I liked him, even though we differed very strongly in our analysis of what was the right way to see the situation and what to do.

I think he was just as strong in his convictions as many of these right wing people in the Republican Party. But I think as a human being he was a good deal more attractive.

Q: You left in 1957?

BOWIE: About August or September.

Q: It was just time for you to go, did you feel? Or was there reason?

BOWIE: There was no policy reason. Harvard had a policy of granting the faculty two-year leave. I had come down in the spring of '53 and in middle '55 I had to either go back or resign. So I resigned and stayed on, decided to stay on for an additional period. Then in early '57 or late '56, the University decided to create a Center for International Affairs and sent a delegation to see me to try to invite me to come back and head up that. I had been on the faculty of the Law School. I decided to accept. I'd been working for four years and was beginning to get feel tired, and more particularly my wife and I had two young children and I saw little of them and I began to feel a certain amount of guilt. And this possibility of setting up a Center and heading it gave me a chance of pursuing international affairs, which by that time had engaged my interest. So I simply decided that at the beginning of the term in the fall term of '57 I would essentially return to Harvard for that purpose. That was the only reason. I regretted leaving, but I simply thought it was the right thing to do.

Q: Dealing with the Department of State, these interviews are also to be read by Foreign Service Officers, what is your impression of the Foreign Service as an instrument of American foreign policy?

BOWIE: I was very much impressed with the quality of the people that came up through the Foreign Service. I felt they were on the whole highly dedicated, intelligent, very hardworking, well-motivated, on the whole disinterested in the sense of not carrying torches, and well informed. Sometimes I felt that in policy meetings like the ones I was describing with Dulles, they were less aggressive in stating their views than I thought

would have been desirable, but they didn't hesitate to state them. I'm not suggesting they were cowardly, it was more that I felt that living within a small organization whose members were going to have to get on with each other for 25 years, that they learned to be perhaps unduly courteous and considerate. This carried over a little bit into the force with which one asserted his views. And I felt that one could separate friendship from rather aggressive disagreements, and acted accordingly. This was partly my lawyer's training. I mean, lawyers are accustomed to fight one another tooth and nail and go out to lunch together. It is a real separation. And it may well be that in the career service like the Foreign Service, maybe that's not wholly possible. I don't know.

In any event, my feeling was that they were not at all cowardly, the better ones certainly, in having a view and stating it, but that they were somewhat more willing to simply state it and leave it at that. And indeed Dulles once or twice said to me, you know, the only criticism I have of the Foreign Service is they're not quite as aggressive as I'd like to see them in stating their views, in pursuing their views.

I think the other thing was that in the '50s the ideal of the generalist was a bit more entrenched as the top aspiration than I thought was desirable. I felt that a person who dedicated himself to becoming really expert in an area ran the risk of hurting his career.

Q: Well, Dr. Bowie, thank you very much for this interview.

End of interview